

# Summary Report of the first FAO Advisory Group on Global Forest Resource Assessments (FRA) 2020

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FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy  
5-6 October 2016

## Introduction

The FAO Advisory Group (AG) on Global Forest Resources Assessments was established in October 2002 on the recommendation of the Expert Consultation held in Kotka, Finland in July 2002 (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-bc249e.pdf>) and later endorsed by the Sixteenth Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) in March 2003.

The AG is a long-term arrangement with meetings anticipated to take place annually. Specifically, the AG is asked to review and make recommendations aimed at strengthening existing institutional networks, making future forest resources assessments increasingly user-oriented and demand-driven and more closely linked with other international processes.



## Participants

Greg Reams (Chair) USDA Forest Service, USA	Joberto Veloso de Freitas (Co-Chair) Serviço Florestal Brasileiro (SFB), Brazil
Carlos Bahamondez Instituto Forestal INFOR, Chile	Maria Palenova Department of Analytical Research of Forest Management and Forest Use, Russian Federation
David Campbell Gibson World Bank Group	Rastislav Raši FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Bratislava, Slovakia
Frédéric Achard Joint Research Center of the EC	Robert Hoft Secretariat of the CBD (Observer)
Gerhard Breulmann International Tropical Timber Organization	Shri Saibal Dasgupta Ministry of Environment and Forests, India
Ian Thompson Canadian Forest Service, Canada	Tomasz Juszczak United Nations Forum on Forests
Jenny L.P. Wong United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	Valerie Kapos UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre

## Invited participants who could not attend the meeting

Martin Aubé Canadian Forest Service	Roman Michalak UNECE Trade and Timber Division
Martin Tadoum Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (COMIFAC)	Ruandha Agung Sugardiman Forest Inventory and Forest Resource Monitoring, Indonesia
Min Zhang Department of Forest Resources Management, China	Steve Johnson, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)

## FAO FRA staff and consultants present

Ms Eva Müller Director of FOA Division	Lauren Flejzor Programme Officer
Anssi Pekkarinen FRA Team Leader	Daniel Wiell Forestry Officer IT
LarsGunnar Marklund FRA Forestry Officer – Remote Sensing	Marisalee Palermo FRA Secretary
Örjan Jonsson FRA Forestry Officer	Lucilla Marinaro FRA Information Management Assistant
Leticia Pina FRA Forestry Officer – Capacity building	Sara Maulo FRA Consultant
Monica Garzuglia FRA Forestry Officer	Valeria Contessa FRA Consultant

## Agenda

### Day 1: Wednesday, 5 October

Ms Müller, Director, Forestry Department, welcomed the AG members, gave an introduction on the FRA programme and presented the main objectives of the meeting.

Mr Reams, Chair of the AG, officially opened the meeting. The opening was followed by a self-introduction of all participants.

### Agenda item 1: Presentation of the current status of FRA programme

Mr Pekkarinen presented the current status of the FRA programme. He provided an overview of the activities conducted this year and listed the following outputs:

- The recruitment of staff for the vacant positions which will be completed soon;
- The ongoing review and consolidation of the final FRA 2015 dataset;
- FRA 2015 Synthesis report which has been updated and disseminated during COFO;
- FRA 2015 Infographics, website, tweets which have been updated and disseminated;
- The PC hardware have been purchased;
- The FRA 2015 evaluation which has been completed and the analysis of the results is ongoing;
- The first FRA 2020 CFRQ partners meeting was held in July;
- The first FRA 2020 AG Meeting has been organized;
- The pilot global assessment on trends in tree cover/land use has been initiated.

Mr Pekkarinen also presented the work plan for FRA 2020 and introduced participants to the Open Foris Collect Earth and SEPAL. These new assessment tools developed in the FAO's Forestry Department can be used in the context of the FRA capacity building plan. A more in depth presentation and demonstration of these tools was given during day two.

Mr Pekkarinen informed the AG members that FAO is a custodian for three forest and FRA related SDG indicators:

- 15.1.1 Forest Area in proportion of land area;
- 15.2.1 Progress towards Sustainable Forest Management;
- 15.4.2 Mountain Green Cover Index.

Mr Pekkarinen concluded by listing some of the key suggestions for improvements received during the FRA 2015 evaluation exercise:

- Improve quality control and consistency in the FRA data;
- Database: improve both the interface and the data accessibility;
- Prepare topic-specific reports, e.g. on non-wood forest products (NWFPs), certifications, trees outside forest, specific tree species popular in international trade;
- Continue capacity development on country reporting;

- Widen the scope to cover: socio economic variables, wood and NWFP products, forest restoration, forest health and forest degradation;
- Improve communication and dissemination;
- Continue increasing the efficiency of reporting (CFRQ, SDGs, other international processes).

### Agenda item 2: Questions and answers

Members commented on the importance of achieving consistency of reported data not only at the national level but also across the various international reporting processes. Harmonizing reporting to these processes would in turn decrease the reporting burden on countries. In order to increase consistency of reporting it was suggested to perform cross checking with other existing data and to consider external reviews. It was noted that the exercise undertaken with the CFRQ represented a good step taken in the right direction. Members also emphasized the importance to perform review and validation of the reported data at the national level. FRA capacity development component could have an important role in facilitating national validation workshops. In the context of capacity building, members also stressed the importance of promoting knowledge sharing at the regional level. Members also suggested investigating the possibility of taking into account the informal sector to improve reporting especially for socio-economic variables.

AG discussed the importance of making sure that data are easily accessible and of increasing visibility of the results through a more user-friendly and interactive website. In relation to the SDGs reporting, members also suggested evaluating the possibility of collecting data that could be useful for other indicators such as forest restoration (indicator 15.3).

Last, participants suggested to communicate clearly the results from both the FRA Global Remote Sensing survey and the FRA country reports and analyse the reasons for the differences that will potentially result between the two assessments.

### Agenda item 3: SWOT analysis

Ms Flejzor introduced participants to the group work on SWOT analysis and briefly explained the purposes of the exercise. Participants were then divided in three groups and the main results from the groups were then shared and discussed in plenary. Ms Flejzor facilitated the discussion and summarized the key results in the matrix below and wrapped up this session.

**STRENGTHS**

- Long time series, global scope
- Official national data
- Highly trusted/ frequently referenced

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Better use of technology
- SDG reporting integration
- Complementarity with other reporting programmes (e.g. AICHI)
- Build capacity based on existing national-level efforts

**OPTIONS**

- Link to other databases (for improved quality)
- Follow/adapt to SDG process (OLI)
- Explore technology options to improve reporting frequency/capacity/QA via fewer variables, capacity building exercises both in-country and online, country pilots, RS
- Move to FRA platform by 2025 → how to get there?

**OPTIONS**

- Ensure greater consistency of definitions and variables
- Simplify/reduce # of variables
- Strongly engage other FAO departments to contribute to the process
- Improve regional engagement, organization, capacity
- Validate data at national level

**WEAKNESSES**

- Need for improved Quality assessment/ quality control
- Frequency of reporting
- Global definitions/variables (type/sectors)
- Capacity to support national teams/country data collection
- Lack of clarity on key users/target audiences

**THREATS**

- Proliferation of data sources (GFW, Google, etc.)
- Low capacity at national level/lack of interministerial cooperation
- Too much public-sector oriented/ lack of information on economic and forest sector

Agenda item 3: Review of AG composition, Terms of Reference and Operational Mechanism

Mr Reams opened the discussion about the AG composition and working modalities. It was suggested expanding participation to the AG to other colleagues within FAO, such as remote sensing Experts to advice on the remote sensing component, and also to consider statisticians and agricultural Officers to promote an inter-sectoral approach.

The Terms of Reference and Operational Mechanism were accepted with no further comments.

Day 2: Thursday, 6 October

Agenda item 1: Presentation on planted forest and discussion

Mr Thompson gave a presentation on planted forests and proposed some options for refining the FRA definitions.

He informed the members that the rationale behind the need of improving FRA definitions comes from the fact that despite most countries are able to report on this variable, there is a need to distinguish between types of planted forests and to better specify the subcategories. This is because currently FRA aggregates all planted forests, regardless of their rotation age or management objectives, so that it is not possible to distinguish between even aged-monoculture tree plantations of exotic species with short rotation from forests where the human intervention is limited.

Mr Thompson illustrated several proposals to disaggregate the reporting on planted forest as summarized in the table below.

<b>Options for reporting planted forests</b>	<b>Results/consequences</b>
<b>PLANTED ONLY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no distinction among planted forest types</li> <li>- criticism from ENGOs over incorrect total forest area based on equivalent fastwood and ANR forests</li> <li>- REDD planted forests pooled into these categories (including reforestation, afforestation)</li> </ul>
<b>PRODUCTIVE, PROTECTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no distinction among production planted forest types</li> <li>- criticism from ENGOs over incorrect total forest area</li> <li>- REDD planted forests pooled into these categories (including reforestation, afforestation)</li> </ul>
<b>PLANTATION, ASSISTED NATURAL REGENERATION (ANR), PROTECTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no subtypes for exotic/native plantation</li> <li>- REDD planted forests pooled into these categories (including reforestation, afforestation)</li> <li>- optimal for reporting (most parsimonious)</li> </ul>
<b>PLANTATION, ANR, PROTECTION, REDD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no subtypes for exotic/native fastwood</li> <li>- little criticism from ENGOs</li> <li>- most useful for other UN agencies (UNFF, CBD, UNFCCC)</li> </ul>
<b>PRODUCTIVE NATIVE, PRODUCTIVE EXOTIC, ANR, PROTECTION, REDD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- most complete distinction among plantation types at a global scale</li> </ul>

He concluded his presentation suggesting that of all the proposed options, FRA should at least aim to distinguish between tree plantations (for wood and fibre production) and planted forests or Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) forests (multiple ecosystem services).

Members agreed that the rationale for reporting on this variable is to try capturing biodiversity issues, rather than identifying management purposes and they suggested avoiding mixing more than one concept while reporting on this variable, such as designation and degree of naturalness. For the same reason, members suggested exploring the possibility of reporting separately exotic from native species in the planted forest.

As it was agreed that a change in the definition would represent a major problem for reporting, participants commented that the best option would be preserving the main category “planted forest” while introducing subcategories allowing making distinction between natural forests (with different degree of human interventions) and intensive tree plantations.

Participants suggested this item to be further discussed at the Expert Consultation.

### Agenda item 2: Demonstration of SEPAL and discussion

Mr Wiell introduced the participants to the SEPAL platform for processing remote sensing images, which has been created by FAO in the context of a project funded by Norway. SEPAL will be provided to the users as a free open source tool, as is hosted by FAO through Amazon. It will be soon tested with limited users and will be ready for a major release at the end of the year.

### Agenda item 3: Presentation on primary forest and discussion

Mr Thompson presented a proposal for improving reporting on primary forests. He highlighted the fact that despite the importance of this topic, the different approaches adopted by the countries while reporting on this variable led to a considerable degree of inconsistency of the results.

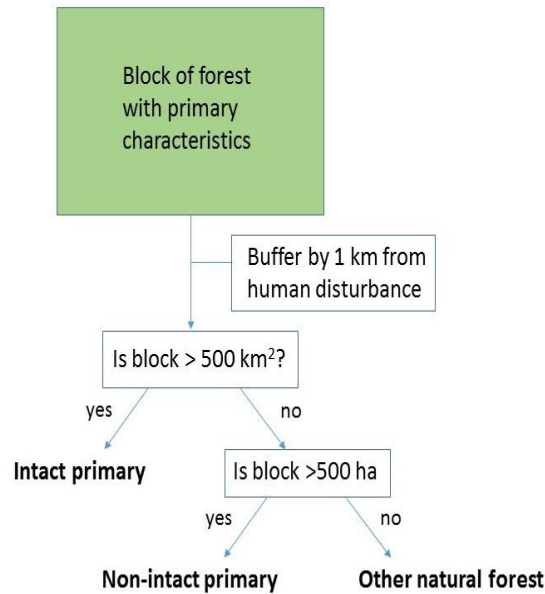
Mr Thompson proposed ecological and operational definitions to better address this variable and raised the attention on the need to define an appropriate scale for different biomes (dimensions of forest patch).

He proposed the following ecological definition:

Naturally regenerated (pristine?) forest of native species, where there are no visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes are not significantly disturbed, regardless of age, and including forests influenced by indigenous and local communities living traditional lifestyles. Primary forests are intact on a landscape of a size that is appropriate to ecosystem processes and enables viable populations of large endemic species and non-intact if at least 500 ha.



The following “Decision tree” was proposed to operationally identify patches of primary forests.



A discussion on this topic was opened.

It was recognized that in general countries do not have record or measurements of primary forest and that they often report on this variable using designation criteria such as the area of forest in protected areas.

The AG suggested the FRA Team to identify problematic or missing data and for clarity purposes to address those countries on how they reported primary forest or on why they reported none.

The members suggested to replace the term “pristine” with something more appropriate and discussed the possibility of explicitly distinguishing between human caused and natural disturbances.

Members discussed the possibility of applying the proposed methodology using remote sensing techniques, while recognizing the difficulty of univocally identifying the “block of forest with primary characteristics” which is the first step of the proposed “decision tree”.

It was proposed that a starting point could be the detection of road-less forest patches, without “visible” human activity. FAO in cooperation with JRC could produce and provide countries with a set of consistent remotely sensed data and the countries could review such data based on local knowledge.

Members suggested to test the proposed methodology for reporting on primary forest in selected countries and to perform case studies. These case studies should be carried out in collaboration with interested countries and their results could be part of a FRA thematic study on primary forests. Members concluded the discussion with the proposal to bring this issue to the attention of the expert consultation for further discussion.

#### Agenda item 4: Demonstration of Open Foris Collect Earth

Mr Pekkarinen displayed a demo video on the use of the Collect Earth tool, which is part of the Open Foris initiative. By providing easier access to Google Earth, Bing Maps and Google Earth Engine, Collect

Earth enables the users to analyse high and very high resolution satellite imagery and ultimately improve the quality of data collection. The AG members welcomed the use of Collect Earth also in the context of the FRA capacity building exercises.

## Agenda item 5: Planning towards FRA 2020

### FRA AG recommendations 2016

#### *1. High quality data reported to FRA 2020*

The AG recommends the FRA team:

- To start the nominations of the national correspondents and follow up during the Regional Forestry Commissions, especially those countries which didn't appoint a NC or report to FRA 2015.
- To continue organizing national capacity development and networking workshops aimed at facilitating in-country collaboration for reporting and improving data quality. This could be done potentially through FAO Country Offices and without going directly in the countries.
- To keep the current forest definition and consider more detailed reporting on planted forests.

#### *2. Harmonization and streamlining of country reporting*

The AG proposes that FRA:

- Facilitates in-country information sharing by actively recommending participation to various events organized by other conventions and initiatives.
- Encourages the collaboration among the focal points for the various conventions (for example; UNFF, CBD, UNFCCC), which for some countries are different.
- Encourages the NCs to improve linkages with other national statistics offices to facilitate consistent reporting on forestry and other land uses to various initiatives and mechanisms.
- Incorporates in FRA related guidelines recommendations for national level coordination and information sharing.
- Continues expansion of CFRQ to include other processes as appropriate.

#### *3. Technology innovations*

AG recommends:

- FAO to develop the FRA website towards an interactive and dynamic platform that allows posting questions, sharing existing data sets, facilitating national consultation, data review and reporting. The system should also allow dissemination and sharing of the national datasets and results, in order to be useful to countries.

#### *4. Remote Sensing*

The AG encourages:

- FRA to further explore the possibilities of using open source geospatial tools and techniques to meet country requirements and add value to national reporting processes.
- FRA to facilitate access to cost-effective cloud computing services, which enable countries to access, process and use remotely sensed data.

#### *5. Capacity building*

See 1 and 2.

#### *6. Special studies*

The AG encourages FRA to carry out special studies in consultation with the reporting countries on the following subjects:

- Forest degradation. AG noted that information on forest degradation (including fragmentation) remains insufficient and recommends FRA to follow ongoing developments in this area. FRA could also ask countries to report on existing approaches to define and monitor forest degradation.
- Primary forest. The AG encourages FRA to carry out a special study on how the primary forest area is currently being reported and to identify which are the barriers to a more direct reporting in line with the current FRA definitions.

#### *7. National networking*

See 1 and 2.

#### *8. Communication and dissemination*

The AG recommends FRA to consider product segmentation that would allow more continuous stream of communication. This could be achieved through special / regional reports on specific issues.

#### *9. Additional recommendations for the FOA department*

The AG considers that the information on the effect of planted forest on water balance is insufficient and recommends FO to look at the possibility to consolidate available information.

#### **Agenda item 6: Closing of the meeting**

Members agreed to schedule the next follow-up meeting for mid-March 2017, through a teleconference.

The meeting closed at: 17:00 hrs.